

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 27, 2014

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Northwest
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama:

We write to encourage you to discuss the ongoing human rights and political crisis in Bahrain with your counterparts in Saudi Arabia during your upcoming visit to the Kingdom later this week. As you know, Saudi Arabia wields significant influence in Bahrain as a result of its strong political, economic, and social ties with Bahrain. Long-term stability in Bahrain can only be achieved through meaningful political reform, and we urge you to encourage the Saudi government to play a more constructive role in this regard.

In the three years since the 2011 protests, the political and human rights situation in Bahrain has continued to deteriorate. The recent bombing outside of Manama that killed three policemen, and the ongoing crackdown on human rights defenders and civil society, underscore the urgent need for a negotiated political solution. Just this week, Ahmed Humaidan, a well-known press photographer, was sentenced to 10 years in jail in connection with an alleged attack on police in April, 2012. The State Department's most recent country reports on human rights confirms the continuation of troubling issues in the Bahrain including, "...citizens inability to change their government peacefully, arrest and detention of protestors on vague charges, in some cases leading to their torture in detention; and lack of due process in trials of political and human rights activists, medical personnel, teachers and students, with some trials resulting in harsh sentences." Furthermore, internal assessments from the State Department on the Bahraini government's progress in implementing the recommendations of the 2011 Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry found that only 5 of the 26 recommendations have been fully implemented.

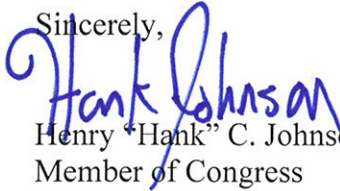
As you stated in May 2011, "The only way forward is for the government and the opposition to engage in a dialogue, and you can't have real dialogue when parts of the opposition are in jail. The government must create the conditions for dialogue, and the opposition must participate to forge a just future for all Bahrainis." Nearly three years later, this remains true. The recent arrest of Khalil al-Marzooq of Al Wefaq, despite his participation in negotiations with the government, as well as the life sentence currently being served by Abdulwahab Hussain, co-founder of the opposition political society al-Wafa', significantly undermine the potential success of any national dialogue process.


The people of Bahrain have made it clear that their demands for legitimate and meaningful reform will not be suppressed. The recent efforts by the Crown Prince and opposition political parties in Bahrain to revitalize the failed National Dialogue process must be given the space to succeed. Failure to address the legitimate aspirations of the Bahraini people could have significant effects on the stability of the region and the long-term security interests of the United States. This includes the viability of the continued presence of the U.S. Fifth Fleet and Central Command.


As two of Bahrain's most important allies, the United States and Saudi Arabia have a unique obligation to positively influence the trajectory of Bahrain toward stability and reform. The Bahraini ruling family will be greatly affected by hearing from their Saudi counterparts that the only way forward is through compromise.

We urge you to discuss the crisis in Bahrain during your upcoming visit to Saudi Arabia, and to encourage the Saudi government to play a constructive role in ending the political and human rights crisis in the country.

Sincerely,


Henry "Hank" C. Johnson
Member of Congress


Jim Moran
Member of Congress


Jim McDermott
Member of Congress


Keith Ellison
Member of Congress


Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress